

DHS Matters!

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Submit stories by e-mail to DHS-Newsletter@michigan.gov

Today's big story

Big Brothers Big Sisters "Lunch Buddy" program

By Cynthia G. Pushman, Director
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Employees from Crawford-Otsego DHS are participating in a local volunteer initiative to mentor local school children. In February 2005 Big Brothers Big Sisters of Northcentral Michigan – representing Gaylord and Grayling – started a pilot "Lunch Buddy" program using adult volunteer mentors from the community. Volunteer mentors are matched with children in grades K-3 at North Ohio Elementary School in Gaylord and at Crawford AuSable Elementary School in Grayling.

"I cannot express to you my overwhelming delight in the positive impact this program has had in such a short period of time on those students participating in the program," North Ohio Elementary School principal Dennis O'Brien said.

"Employees from the Department of Human Services were the first to sign up and train for the program. I was amazed at the response from DHS employees," said Kathy Holmes, director of Big Brothers Big Sisters. "They expressed a desire to become involved as soon as we started talking about the pilot and I am grateful for their support and enthusiasm."

From the Crawford County DHS we have [Sherry Hoyt](#), [Susan Tomasek](#), [Irene Dickie](#) and [Cindy Pushman](#) participating. From Otsego County DHS [Michelle Hacker](#), [Kim Lauterwasser](#), [Bruce Bailey](#) are participating, as well as Nancie Kersey from the local Michigan 4C.

Over the past two decades, school-based mentoring has emerged as a most popular approach to improve self-esteem, attitude, attendance and achievement of school-age children. Its instant success can be attributed to the program's basic principles.

The program matches caring adults in the community with youths that could benefit from the attention and long-term relationships. The time commitment is less than an hour a week in a safe, monitored, and supervised environment.

Holmes said she anticipates expanding the program into other elementary schools next fall. "Other schools are already calling us, asking if we can bring Lunch Buddies to their school," she said. "My goal was to set up 10 lasting matches; so far we have 21 Lunch Buddies at North Ohio."

Mentoring is a concept that has existed, formally and informally, since the beginning of time. All of us who are successful can think back and remember those individuals – in family, in the community, at work or in church – that have been there for us.

These special people have guided us, provided us with unconditional love, protected and nurtured us and sent us this very important message: "You count and I will always be there to support you." These are our mentors.

In the Lunch Buddies program, mentors like the safety factor of being at the school and a lunch hour is very doable. Together, the mentors and children eat lunch and spend time talking, playing games, going over homework, reading, or going outside. The focus is on developing a relationship with the child, being a friend, and lending support.

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Oakland County efforts raise \$4,000 for charity

From Lynn Contreras

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On the day after Christmas – when many of us were thinking only about more celebrating with our family and our friends and our refrigerators were stuffed full with holiday leftovers – on the other side of the world, a natural disaster of unprecedented proportions was taking place. I'm sure as we all watched the news footage and heard the reports; we could barely comprehend the destruction. As word went out about the death and devastation, the grand scale of it all cried out for a response just as huge. And so many countries and people on a local level did respond.

In a human service organization like ours we deal with clients every day who are in need of help and hope and we couldn't let the suffering of those affected by the tsunami pass without us helping in some way. Our district offices in Oakland County launched a fundraiser and were able to raise \$4,000! The money was raised through various fundraising activities over a four-week period – from casual days and silent auctions to a hot potato luncheon. Kudos to the Walled Lake District Office for raising the most money!

After researching various humanitarian organizations, it was decided to contribute the funds collected to Habitat for Humanity International (HFHI). Since many organizations providing immediate relief to the area had reached their fundraising goals, we felt that HFHI was a good choice. We know that if that area of the world is to ever fully recover, assistance must be long term and sustained. HFHI is going to help in the effort to rebuild lives and communities. Habitat for Humanity was established in the United States in 1976 with the goal of eliminating homelessness and inadequate housing around the world. HFHI currently works in 100 countries and will be providing supplies and training centers to help rebuild homes and teach job skills to the survivors of the tsunami.



Oakland County DHS director **Margaret Warner** presents the donation check to **Steve Campbell**, director of Habitat for Humanity Oakland County. Pictured right: **Lynn Contreras**.

Correction

A recycling story published April 10 indicated the program could accept both printer cartridges and cell phones. The program has been approved for print cartridges only. Through the program - a partnership with Michigan Association of School Boards and America's School Recycling Program - local DHS offices can recycle empty printer cartridges at no cost (and with just about no work) and earn funds for their local accounts. For information on the program go to "DHS Letter Series" link at the bottom of DHS-Net, click on L-letters and see L-05-026.

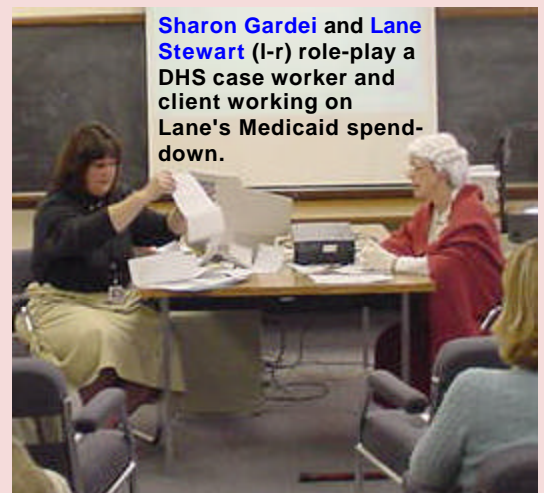
There are many ways to train

From Mary A. Schoen, Administrative Assistant

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Two family independence managers at Kent County have stepped into a new phase in their careers. While training staff on Medicaid spend down and the Medical Review Team (MRT) process, **Lane Stewart** and **Sharon Gardei** took on the characters of client and worker to role-play two different fact finding interviews to gather this information. In the first training, **Minnie Adams** came to DHS looking for "Miss Sharon" who has always helped her with her spend down. Minnie brought a bag of bills and receipts and together they sorted and used the different bills and receipts to meet Minnie's spend down for several months. In the second training, Minnie's niece, **Winnie Adams**, came to DHS to get help with medical bills and allowed staff to watch as she and the worker completed the forms necessary to send for a determination of disability from the Medical Review Team. By using the role-play method, training that might otherwise have been boring and hard to follow became interesting and thought provoking. For staff that were stressed out and dreading another training, a little humor went a long way. We congratulate these supervisors for thinking out of the box and thank them for continually striving to assist their workers in understanding multi-faceted policy issues.



Administrative Professionals Day

April 27 was Administrative Professionals Day in the Department of Human Services and elsewhere, a day to celebrate and reward the contributions of administrative professionals. Plenty of celebrations were held at DHS offices including one for administrative professionals in Central Office in Lansing, where they enjoyed brunch and gifts.

"I would like to thank you and all the people who worked so diligently to provide a very enjoyable Administrative Professionals Day celebration," said **Barbara Horton** to members of the planning group. Horton works for DHS Family Support Services Division.

"I have served on planning committees for a number of celebrations and I know how much time, hard work and money is involved. This is the last year in which I will be celebrating this event with DHS.

"After being on payroll for 39 years I am going to retire next March. At the celebration I took time to reflect upon past memories with the secretaries present and with those who are no longer here. Plus, I have a nice plant to take with me."

Similar events were held elsewhere in the DHS universe.

"Employees of the Allegan County DHS helped their administrative support staff celebrate Administrative Professionals' Day by preparing and serving a brunch and honoring them with gifts of appreciation," said Allegan County DHS director **Susan Bailey Carmen**. "The brunch included fresh fruit, bagels, quiche, orange juice, coffee and tea. Gifts were candle holders with candles or a pewter bookmark."



Allegan County administrative professionals include (l-r) Jackie Cooley, Debbie Belden, Allen Armintrout, Sally Gunn, Sharon VandeVrede, Renee Rincones, LuAnn Smith and Wendy Miller. Not pictured are Jan Belden, Cindy Spaman and Stacy Flores.

Gutter balls for charity

From Dan Carley
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The Gratiot County Big Brother/ Big Sister organization held their annual "Bowl for Kids" fundraiser April 9 in Alma.

Representing the Gratiot County DHS office at this event (pictured at right) was the team AKA "Gutter balls gotta count for something" of **Tina Erickson, Kelly Ritter, Amy Byrne & Abbey Brooks**.

The group raised over \$150 with all proceeds going to the local Big Brother Big Sister agency. This was the second year that Gratiot DHS staff participated in this worthwhile event.



Date: April 19
To: DHS County Directors
Subj: Branch-Hillsdale counties

There is no better way to encourage the (Michigan) Legislature to provide funding for DHS than to show them that the department is doing a good job. At the hearing this morning Representative Caswell, who represents Branch and Hillsdale counties, said that DHS employees are hardworking and dedicated. He said that a couple of months ago one of his local grocery stores was cut off from accepting Food Assistance on the Friday before a three-day weekend. DHS employees worked the entire weekend, one even came in during his vacation to straighten out the situation. Since Rep. Caswell is on the Appropriations Subcommittee on DHS his comments are invaluable. A big thank you to DHS employees who do such stellar work!

Ellen Speckman-Randall

Michigan County Social Services Association, Lansing

■ Submitted by Connie Dykman, director of Branch-Hillsdale DHS, with permission of the author. State Rep. Bruce Caswell hails from Hillsdale.

Your letters,
intercepted
and otherwise

Date: April 13
To: FIA Office of Child Support
Subj: Thanks for your support

If your office is like ours, the complaints seem to outnumber the compliments, so I thought I would forward some compliments for you. One of our client's employers made a mistake and sent a check for \$2,000 to MiSDU (Michigan State Disbursement Unit) that was made out to Wells Fargo Bank and sent the MiSDU check to Wells Fargo. She called our office late Friday afternoon and I gave her the number for the Employer Assistance Line. She spoke with "Jennifer" and was very impressed by her professionalism and the way she was treated.

She called our office today to tell us that she had gotten the check back in the mail by Monday. She still hasn't gotten the check from Wells Fargo. She said she would much rather deal with the state of Michigan than a large financial corporation. Thank you for your assistance. If the check had gone through, and there were arrears to be paid, some custodial parent out there would have been very happy this week. Thanks again!

Sharon A. Hannu

Gogebic County Friend of the Court Office, Bessemer

■ The MiSDU is part of Michigan's child support network, which is administered by FIA Office of Child Support in collaboration with county Friend of the Court and prosecutor offices.

Date: March 11
To: Denise Chambers, Director
Genesee County DHS, Flint
Subj: Thank you

On behalf of the Storehouse ministry of our congregation, I want you and your phenomenal staff to know that we were completely blown away by your spectacular generosity to this outreach back in December! Your donations left us teary-eyed and delighted – to partner with your workers in feeding hungry people in our city *made* Christmas for us!

The groceries you graciously provided were distributed through the month of December. Through those weeks, we averaged almost 400 families per week, dispensing over four tons of food weekly. Your staff had a hand in feeding not hundreds but thousands of individuals through the holiday season. We commend you and thank you from the bottom of our hearts.

Please extend our heartfelt appreciation to your employees. We treasure this new partnership in helping needy families in our community. Thank you again for representing the very best our community can be!

Pastor Tom Mattiuzzo

Riverside Tabernacle, Flint

■ Genesee County staff contributed nonperishable food in December through a staff challenge Chambers initiated. The work unit making the greatest contribution was rewarded with a free casual day in January. Riverside Tabernacle provides food to between 200-500 families each week.

DHS Matters! is a product of Michigan's Department of Human Services
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